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Differentiation in Elementary General Music

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EDCI 589 Applied Research

University of Mary Washington

Summer 2013

I pledge on my honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.

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Introduction

Rationale

In 1983, a report called *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, assessed the quality of education in the United States and determined that American students were underachieving and underperforming on math and reading tests as compared to students from other countries. This report put education in the forefront of American politics and new discussions began about how to better educate American children and prepare them to be competitive in a global economy (Graham, 2013).

States began reform efforts and created goals that specifically described the knowledge and skills expected of students to be able to work productively in a global economy. These reforms became the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*. The arts were among subjects named as one of the core academic subjects (National Association for Music Education, 2013). Through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations crafted a document outlining comprehensive competencies in the arts known as the Nine National Standards for Music Education. The Standards not only outline the facets of a quality musical education, but they also show the importance of the discipline, how the arts enhance overall learning, and how arts education supports building 21st Century Skills (National Association for Music Education, 2013).

With the national push for education reforms, other academic disciplines such as math, science, and language arts also developed new standards (Graham, 2011). In 2002 President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB was designed to

hold states accountable for student learning and achievement. Annual testing in math and reading began adding considerable fiscal challenges for states to pay for standardized tests (Education Week, 2011). With new measures in place and financial resources diverted to the tested core subjects, funding for other federally designated core subjects was reduced (Chapman, 2005). While the Standards for Music Education still guide curriculum development, the reductions in funding means time to teach is shifted into the testable core subjects: Fewer classes per year are devoted to teaching music and fewer music specialists are used to teach these classes, thus creating the same amount of content being taught over a shorter amount of time (Chapman, 2005; Kornhaber & Krechevsky, 1995; Orman, 2002).

Problem Statement

The Nine National Standards of Music Education encompass a well-rounded education in music (Conway, 2008). Including all these standards into a quality elementary music program requires a well-rounded curriculum with time to implement it, however on average most music programs provide students one 40-minute music class a week (NCES, 2012). Furthermore, surveys show that music teachers spend most of their time on the standards concerning singing, playing instruments, and music literacy (reading and notating music) with less time spent on listening, understanding music in relation to other disciplines, or understanding music in history and culture (Orman, 2002). Music teachers use instructional methods of whole group instruction, modeling, and lecturing but spend less time on activities that engage the student as a more active participant (Orman, 2002). Considering the current time restraints and instructional

methods elementary music teachers commonly use, students are not receiving a well-rounded musical education.

Research Questions

What does a well-developed elementary music curriculum entail?

What knowledge and skills are expected of elementary music students?

What are the issues faced by elementary music teachers and how do they currently use their time to meet student needs?

What strategies can elementary general music teachers use to help differentiate lessons for all their students?

Literature Synthesis

The literature reviewed for this project discusses the Nine National Standards for Music Education as the basis for the development of a music curriculum and how the Virginia Department of Education uses these Standards to develop the elementary general music curriculum. Next, it reviews the problems inherent in teaching a full curriculum in a compacted time. Finally, it reviews instructional practices elementary music teachers can use in their classrooms as a way to meet the Standards and the SOLs.

Curriculum

A well-developed music curriculum is based on the work from the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations. The Consortium asserted that arts education is a process beginning in elementary school and developed over the course of a student's education. By the time students finish secondary school, they should be able to recognize works from a variety of cultures and time periods; they should have some basic competency to be able to communicate in art, music, dance, and theater; and they should

be proficient in one artistic discipline. The specific music standards address the entire domain of music education including aural and visual literacy, performance, evaluation of performances, and understanding the relationship of music in culture, history, and other arts disciplines (National Association for Music Education, 2013). The following are the standards:

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture (National Standards for Music Education, 2013, para 1).

The Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) for General Music are currently aligned with the Nine National Standards for Music Education and are outlined as specific knowledge and skills at each grade level (Virginia Department of Education, 2006). According to the SOL elementary music documents, the general elementary music SOLs listed are not taught as single skills, but rather as part of a comprehensive program designed for music. The skills are placed in categories of performance and

production, cultural context and music theory, judgment and criticism, and aesthetics (Virginia Department of Education, 2006). Recently, however, the Standards have been reviewed by a panel of educators and are undergoing some changes to reflect work done with the Core Curriculum Standards (Powers, 2013). Powers explains that the Standards should continue to be guidelines for designing a high quality music curriculum.

Though the Standards exist as a structure for what constitutes a well-rounded education, many school systems interpret how the Standards should be implemented (Conway, 2008). In her article, Conway notes that all music teachers (instrumental, choral, primary, or secondary) should be teaching all of the standards, however, when students begin instrumental music programs, usually in secondary school, they are no longer engaged in Standard 1: Singing Alone and with Others. In the Virginia elementary general music SOL, Standard 1 and Standard 2: Performing on instruments alone and with others (National Standards for Music Education, 2013) are combined under the category of Performance and Production (Virginia Department of Education, 2006). Elementary general music teachers may not spend much time on Standard 3: Improvising Melodies, Variations, and Accompaniments because this standard implies jazz studies and is something usually part instrumental education at the secondary level (Conway, 2008).

An equally important consideration about the Standards is how the western musical perspective figures heavily into their creation and focuses on highly valued skills found in traditional western musical education (Schmidt, 1996). Standard 4: Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines, and Standard 5: Reading and notating

music are both highly valued in western music culture and both require a certain amount of study and practice to master while other cultures value oral traditions (Schmidt, 1996).

Finally, integral to the Standards movement is the idea of increased teacher accountability. If all music teachers are being held accountable according to these National Standards, then it becomes vitally important for elementary general music teachers to include all the standards in their curriculum because of their focus on providing a comprehensive foundation (Schmidt, 1996).

Issues Faced By General Music Teachers

General music specialists provide elementary music students with the important foundations in each of the Standards and the SOLs: An elementary general music curriculum is full of singing, playing instruments, creating melodies or accompaniments, learning to read and write music, listening and evaluating music, and understanding music as it relates to culture or other subjects (NCES, 2012; Virginia Department of Education, 2006). The problem that most specialists face is the lack of adequate time in which to teach (Baker, 2012; Byo, 2000; Orman, 2002; Russell-Bowie, 2009). On average, music classes meet once a week for 40 minutes (NCES, 2012). Over the course of a year this means about 27 hours of music education per class assuming there are no cancellations due to weather, teacher absence, field trips, or testing schedules. Music teachers must prepare well-planned lessons that engage, educate, and allow for some practice in order to make the most of their time in class.

How are teachers using instructional time in class? Early studies by Forsythe (1977) and Moore (1981) show that teachers spent about 4% of the time working on movement, 10% on listening, and up to 11% spent on reading or notating rhythm. Later

Orman (2002) found that teachers spent 46% of their time talking and 21% of their time modeling any of the musical skills (singing, playing instruments, movement, and rhythm) with or without students. Students used less than 10% of the time in activities. These studies showed that elementary general music specialists are also able to teach the Standards in their class time, but questions remain whether modeling and preparing students using lecture methods are the most effective use of time and involve students enough in their own learning (Hanna, 2007).

Differentiation

Differentiation offers teachers strategies to help meet the needs of all their students. According to Carol Ann Tomlinson (2000), differentiation is about creating learning environments that fit the students. Differentiation is necessary because of various levels of student readiness, student interest, and learning style (Davis, Rimm, & Siegle, 2011; Standerfer, 2011).

In order for differentiation to be effective, there must be a quality curriculum behind it (Davis, et al, 2011). The National Standards, the Virginia SOLs for music, and local curriculum maps provide the framework for essential knowledge and skills. Elementary general music teachers need to know how the curriculum is developed so that they can move students appropriately along the continuum (Davis, et al, 2011; Standerfer, 2011).

Next, teachers must pre-assess students to determine what they know. This can be done with surveys, tests, observations, or any other method and are usually not graded (Davis, et al, 2011; Hillier, 2011; Sousa, et al, 2011; Standerfer, 2011). Assessment helps teachers decide on what remediation, extension, activities, or groupings are necessary.

Teachers then know where differentiate the content, the process, or the products (Sousa, et al, 2011; Tomlinson 2000).

Differentiating content, process, and product. According to Tomlinson (2000), differentiating content means that teachers use multiple resource material or that they present material using multiple modalities based on student strengths and interests. Tomlinson and Sousa (2011) explain that using areas of student interest to help students relate to content moves them from familiar ideas to more complex ones.

Differentiating the process involves finding appropriate levels of support or challenge and provides students with opportunities to apply skills (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011). It also includes the use of centers or using the Equalizer (Tomlinson, 2000). The Equalizer is a tool that allows teachers to plan for tiered lessons. The teacher adjusts the difficulty of a lesson by visualizing a control, much like one on the volume on a CD player. When considering ways to challenge a student, the teacher visualizes where the slider might be between two attributes of complexity: Foundational/transformational, simple/complex, or less structured/more structure (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011).



Figure 1. Tomlinson's Equalizer. Figure 1 is an example of Tomlinson's Equalizer showing the slider on a continuum of less structure to more structure.

Another way to address student readiness is through the use of learning contracts. Teachers are able to offer choices to students while encouraging their independence.

Contracts outline specific skills that can be tailored to student readiness and interest.

Teachers use the contracts to track formative assessment data.

Differentiating products allows students have choices in how to express their knowledge and skills. The product is a demonstration of their learning and is the summative assessment of a unit of study or lesson (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011). It allows students to apply their knowledge and skills to authentic learning situations.

Differentiation in elementary general music. Elementary general music teachers often see hundreds of students over the course of a week and may find it challenging to use differentiation techniques that seem time consuming. Even finding time to evaluate students for interest and ability can seem overwhelming (Hillier, 2012). In her article, Hillier (2012) asks teachers to consider several things to make differentiation more manageable.

First, she suggests that elementary general music teachers focus on fewer objectives and skills for struggling learners. She reminds these teachers to look at the essential skills that will eventually be important when students move into secondary school.

Next, Hillier (2011) notes that music teachers assess using formative observations by giving constant, specific feedback during rehearsals. Likewise, teachers who differentiate also constantly assess and give feedback to their students (Tomlinson, 2000). Since assessment and tracking progress is important, she advises teachers to extend assessment with students by having them write evaluations in music journals. This also addresses Standard 7: Evaluating music and musical performances (NCES 2012).

Additionally, the traditional view of instructional practices in a music classroom has been teacher-centered. Teachers spend much of their time modeling, lecturing, and giving feedback (Forsythe 1977; Hillier, 2011; Moore, 1981; Orman, 2002). Instead, Hillier (2011) suggests that the elementary general music teacher find ways to collaborate with students and put students in a position where they take on more leadership in the classroom and in the lessons. The use of student contracts will allow students to take control of their goals and their own learning.

Finally, Hillier (2011) encourages elementary general music teachers to find respectful tasks for their students. Though many of the activities in music classes culminate in performances where a group of students must act with one mindset, it is worth the time it takes to allow students grow. Allowing students to shine in their own strengths shows respect for them as learners.

Though the work of differentiating for multiple classes and grades seems large, differentiating instruction in an elementary general music classroom can help teachers focus the exact skills and knowledge their students need to build the best foundation in all of the National Standards and the SOLs. Differentiation offers ways to meet the needs of all students.

Conclusions

The past few decades of education reform included music as a core subject and influenced music educators to specifically detail the skills and knowledge students should have as a result of a well-rounded music curriculum. This consensus brought the Nine National Standards for Music Education into the national discussion and states aligned their curriculum requirements with the Standards. With the national education reforms,

academic subjects also refined their standards. After NCLB, states became accountable for student learning and achievement. More testing requirements went into place shifting funding away from the arts and into core academic subjects and testing programs. Simultaneously, time spent in core academic subjects was increased to prepare students for the tests. The shift in funds and time meant that there is less time scheduled for music classes. With less time to deliver the same curriculum, elementary general music teachers feel they are left with having to sacrifice parts of the curriculum.

Surveys and observations show that elementary general music teachers use instructional delivery methods such as whole group instruction and modeling. While these methods are still important, infusing differentiation strategies into their teaching can help them to still meet the standards while engaging their students in a more meaningful learning process. When elementary music educators better understand how to use different methods of differentiation, they will be able to meet the diverse needs of the students they teach and will be able to provide a comprehensive foundation in elementary general music.

Application

Elementary general music teachers often see the entire population of the school once a week. Lessons often include singing, playing instruments, and literacy components. While elementary music teachers employ a number of instructional strategies, using differentiation in a thoughtful way makes the lessons more meaningful for the students. This application shows examples of differentiation techniques anchored in curricular ideas from the National Standards and Virginia 3rd grade general music

SOLs. The intent of this application is to show the possibilities for differentiation using tiered instruction, contracts, and centers in a 3rd grade elementary general music class.

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Appendix

Tiered Instruction: The Laundry Game. Tiered instruction allows students to work with the same material but with varying levels of complexity or challenge. Sousa and Tomlinson (2011) recommend using The Equalizer tool when thinking about ways to change the level (pp. 102-105). The tool allows teachers to provide varying degrees of challenge by changing the elements of the lesson: more/less structure, fewer/more facets, or simple/complex. The Laundry Game uses varied music reading levels and scaffolding (color-coding and solfège symbols) to provide levels of challenge.

Placing students in groups with the correct level of support is important. Offering options to move in and out of groups as necessary helps students receive the correct balance of practice and exposure to new material, concepts, or level of challenge.



Figure 2. Laundry Game Cards. Figure 2 shows the possibilities for scaffolding in the Laundry Game.

The yellow cards begin the most basic level of scaffolding: The staff is simple (2 lines) and the notes use solfege symbols to assist reading and note placement. The orange cards leave the simple staff but take away the solfege symbols. The blue cards use color-coded notes with solfege symbols on the full treble staff. The green cards continue the color-coding. Rhythmic values add complexity to the literacy component. Finally, the red cards take all color-coding and solfege symbols away.

The Laundry Game:

Standard and SOL	Assessment	Differentiation Strategy
<p>National Standard 1: Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.</p> <p>National Standard 5: Reading and notating rhythm.</p> <p>SOL: 3.1 The student will a repertoire of songs in tune and with a clear tone quality.</p> <p>1. Sing melodies within the range of an octave.</p>	<p>The student will correctly sing (alone) from the collection of pitches: low do, re, mi, sol, la, and high do.</p>	<p>Tiered game.</p> <p>Students in small groups sing the laundry song together: Socks in the washer, socks in the dryer, take a sock out, sing low sing higher... as they sing the song, they pass a little laundry basket around with laundry cards. When the song stops, the player chooses a laundry card and sings the notes on it. If they sing it correctly, they keep the card. Drawing the underwear card allows the student to steal another player's card as long as they sing it correctly. The player with the most cards at the end wins.</p> <p>Offer a variety of levels. Start with repeated pitches, few notes, a simple staff, and solfege reminders. Use color-coding for early staff reading. Adding more notes with more leaps and skips adds complexity to the tiers.</p>

Learning Contracts: Recorder Karate. Contracts can take many forms and are useful for addressing varied levels of student readiness. Teachers are able to target specific skill areas while offering students choice. Good contracts include a plan, timelines, and teacher approval of work completed (Sousa, et. al, 2011).

In 3rd grade general music classes, students learn to play the recorder. Recorder Karate through Plank Road Publishing provides sequential lessons that add new notes or rhythms of increasing difficulty to each new piece. The recorder pieces are familiar early childhood songs that students may have sung in previous years. As they master a piece, students are rewarded with a karate belt (a ribbon) to tie on the end of their recorder.

While most students love the idea of earning belts, they sometimes do not love all the songs or have trouble with the progression that Recorder Karate offers. Contracts can be a very rewarding way to help student progress through a recorder unit. Before beginning the unit, a rubric is necessary so that students understand what is expected of them to be able to move through the various songs.

Recorder Rubric

4-Mastery	3-On Target
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I play all notes and rhythms correctly. • I use the correct hand position and fingerings all the time. • I produce a pleasant tone (no squeaks, whisper breath). • I sound well-prepared in my performance- my tempo is steady, excellent fluency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I play my notes and rhythms correctly. • I use the correct hand position and fingerings though I may need a reminder one or two times. • I produce a pleasant tone (no squeaks, whisper breath). • I play with fluency most of the time. My tempo is steady.

2-Developing	1-Preparing to Learn
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know many of my notes and rhythms but I need a little more practice. • I still need help with my hand position or fingerings- maybe a little more practice. • My notes come out but I need some more practice using a whisper breath- some squeaks or some notes do not speak well. • My tempo is not steady- I know some parts of my song better than others but a few places are still challenging. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am not sure what these notes are or how to read the rhythms. • I do not remember the fingerings for the notes. • I blow too hard and it squeaks or too little and notes will not come out. • My tempo is erratic.

Figure 3. Recorder Rubric. Figure 3 is an example of a recorder rubric with student-friendly language.

Recorder Learning Contract: _____			
2nd and 3rd Quarter recorder unit: November-April 4, 2014			
Skill	Song	Belt	Test Date and score
BAG	Hot Cross Buns	white	/
BAG	Gently Sleep	yellow	/
BAG	Merrily We Roll	orange	/
BAGE	It's Raining	green	/
DEBAG	Old McDonald	purple	/
DEBAGD'	When the Saints	blue	/
DEBAF#GD'	Twinkle, Twinkle	red	/
New meter= in 3	Amazing Grace	brown	/
DGABC'D'	Ode To Joy	black	/
	Student choice	bronze	/
	Student choice	silver	/
	Student choice	gold	/

Figure 4. Recorder Learning Contract. Figure 4 is a sample of a recorder learning contract.

Recorder Learning Contract

Standard and SOL	Assessment	Differentiation Strategy
<p>Standard 2: Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.</p> <p>Standard 5: Reading and notating music.</p> <p>Standard 6: Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.</p> <p>SOL 3.3 The student will notate and perform melodies from the treble staff, using traditional notation.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use voice or melodic instruments. 2. Use a wide range of tempos and dynamics. 3. Recognize that music is divided into measures. 	<p>Students will learn pieces on the recorder, scored accordingly to the rubric. A score of a 3 or 4 reflects adequate progress on a piece and the student may begin another piece.</p>	<p>Student contracts outline the various pieces in the recorder unit of study with some flexibility offered in choice of piece (appropriate replacement pieces determined by the teacher).</p> <p>Some contracts can also outline a student generated plan about how the student will achieve their goals.</p> <p>Students practice in the manner that works best for them (alone, partners, small groups). They evaluate themselves and others both verbally and written using the PEP method: Praise, encourage, praise.</p> <p>The teacher visits with students to evaluate progress and listen for belt tests. At her discretion, the teacher can add scaffolding or compact curriculum as needed.</p>

Centers: Music Listening. Centers provide students with ways to build a knowledge base and to practice skills. Here, pre-assessment is important to know how to group students, where to start groups in centers, and what options to provide within each center.

In the listening center, students choose a writing activity. They may either write a newspaper critique of one of the listening examples, draw a scene that goes with the music and explain how the scene and the music fit together, or they write an interview with the composer (or perhaps from the perspective of the musician). Each assignment requires students to use musical vocabulary to describe the music (form, instrumentation/timbre, tempo, and dynamics) and asks the student to make connections to culture, personal experiences, or to other disciplines.

Music listening center:

Standard and SOL	Assessment	Differentiation Strategy
<p>Standard 6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.</p> <p>Standard 7. Evaluating music and music performances.</p> <p>3.12 The student will identify the four orchestral families (woodwind, string, brass, percussion), using sight and sound.</p> <p>3.13 The student will demonstrate the melodic shape (contour) of a musical phrase, using music terminology to describe how pitches may move upward, downward, or stay the same.</p>	<p>The student will be able to evaluate music using terminology to describe tempo, instrumentation, and dynamics.</p>	<p>Centers- differentiating content and product</p> <p>Students work in groups and participate in centers at their appropriate level as determined by pre-assessment/observation. Vocabulary center work is designed to help students understand the music terms necessary to evaluate music. The sorting activity is designed to anchor basic categories and associated vocabulary.</p> <p>The product is an individual writing project of their choice. For the writing, students are provided with a rubric indicating what is important in the evaluation of their product.</p>

